

The Need for Rail Transit in Maine

What now exists

- The Downeaster connects Brunswick, Freeport, Portland, Old Orchard Beach, Saco and Wells plus cities in New Hampshire, Massachusetts and the entire nation.
- Inter and Intra State Bus service
- “Last mile” bus service in Portland, Wells, Saco, Old Orchard Beach and Brunswick

Why is extending service to Bangor needed?

- Brunswick to Bangor is approximately 110 miles and in between are the major cities of Augusta and Waterville.
- Over the past several decades, cities located north and east of Portland have experienced a steady population growth, which has resulted in increases in highway traffic.
- Maine, with its unique weather needs and short but intense tourist season, needs to develop rail passenger service to complement and enhance other transportation systems, accommodate future travel demand, ensure state economic viability, support our population and to protect Mainers’ quality of life.
- Fortunately, the 2021 Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act included a requirement and a means for the Federal Railroad Administration to identify capital projects and funding needed to implement improved transportation.

Economics

- **Transportation and land use patterns are inextricably linked.** Transportation facilities and networks have the power to shape development, influence property values, and determine a neighborhood's character and quality of life. Development land in urban centers is lost to parking lots. More roads and wider roads have never solved congestion.
- **Integrated transportation and land use planning gives people more choices for getting around their town and their region.** This expanded transportation choice makes it easier to incorporate physical activity into daily routines, reduces transportation costs, and gives more freedom and mobility to low-income individuals, senior citizens, disabled persons, and others who cannot afford or choose not to drive or own a car. The average yearly cost for U.S. households to own and operate a new car reached \$10,728 in 2022.
- **The United States is in the midst of a demographic shift that will have major effects on the nation's housing market and development patterns.** Market surveys and research have consistently shown that at least one-third of homebuyers prefer homes in smart growth neighborhoods, and this share is growing. Housing costs and shortages in preferred urban areas (Portland for example) are undermining the labor market and causing sprawl which is more expensive for government supported services (police, emergency medical, roads etc)
- **The State, cities and towns are paying for** maintaining, expanding, extending, and widening roads without an increase in taxable income.
- **In Maine user fees** (auto taxes, tolls, and gasoline taxes) cover only 63% of the cost of roads. In addition to local road maintenance local real estate taxes are used to provide emergency services in the case of car accidents.
- **Maine attracts 34 million tourists yearly.** While some come by bus, the Downeaster, or cruise ships, many drive costing Maine residents extra costs through traffic delays and the need for additional traffic infrastructure.

Patterns of Demand

- **College students**
 - Traveling home
 - Visiting other locations to socialize
 - Part time jobs
- **Young families** needing to get by with one car
 - The average yearly cost for U.S. households to own and operate a new car reached \$10,728 in 2022. Used cars are no longer the bargain they once were. Used car prices are high, financing is often subprime and older vehicles require expensive maintenance.
 - Desire to take the entire family on a trip without worrying about safety.
 - Generation Z, like the Millennials before them, have a lower percentage driving or getting their licenses. In 1997 90 percent of 20-25 year olds got their licenses, by 2020 it was down to 80 percent.
- **Seniors**
 - Night driving issues
 - Needing to go to Portland or Boston for specialized Medical treatments
 - Costs associated with owning a cars
- **Tourists** who want to enjoy visiting the State without worrying about driving.

Quality of Life

- All weather transportation.
- The ability to avoid the hassle of traffic especially during high tourist visitation. A Boston study of MBTA demonstrated \$11.4 billion annual economic benefits from saved travel time as well as fewer crashes and emissions.
- Complements and enhances other transportation modes by increasing demand and frequency.
- Environmental Affects
 - Decreases pollution – for example if just Gen z drove 972 fewer miles a year (10% less miles than average), it would cut pollution by the equivalent of 6 coal fired power plants.
 - Encourages Transit-oriented development (TOD) which can help lower household transportation costs, boost public transit ridership, reduce greenhouse gas emissions and air pollution, spur economic development, and make housing more affordable by reducing developer expenditures on parking and allowing higher-density zoning.

Next Steps

Steps taken and needed to further the goal:

- LD 227 Propensity study – in process but only measured traffic between Portland and Bangor
- LD 860 an Act to Identify the Railroad Lines from Portland to Bangor as an extended Major Corridor and to Fund a Feasibility Study.
- A “Vision plan” approved by the Governor for Maine Passenger Rail, followed by a “Corridor Designation” with stations identified as part of a Level 1 Service Development Plan. Federal Funds can then be applied for a complete cost analysis.